HEBREWS AND THE GENERAL EPISTLES

Copyright © 2023 by Kevin L. Anderson

The Foundry Publishing®
PO Box 419527
Kansas City, MO 64141
thefoundrypublishing.com

ISBN 978-0-8341-4171-1

Printed in the
United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Cover design: Caines Design
Interior design: Jody Langley

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked AT are the author's translations.

The following version of Scripture is in the public domain:
The King James Version (KJV)

The following copyrighted versions of Scripture are used by permission:
The Common English Bible (CEB). © Copyright 2011 Common English Bible. All rights reserved.

The Christian Standard Bible (CSB). Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. All rights reserved.

The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

GOD'S WORD® (GW). Copyright © 1995, 2003, 2013, 2014, 2019, 2020 by God's Word to the Nations Mission Society. Used by permission of Baker Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

The Lexham English Bible (LEB). Copyright 2012 Logos Bible Software. Lexham is a registered trademark of Logos Bible Software.

The New American Bible, revised edition (NABRE). Copyright © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All rights reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

The New American Standard Bible® (NASB®), Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

New American Standard Bible® (NASB1995), Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

The NET Bible® (NET) copyright © 1996, 2019 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. http://netbible.com. All rights reserved.

The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), published and copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd., and *Les Editions du Cerf*.

The New King James Version® (NKJV). Copyright © 1982 Thomas Nelson. All rights reserved.

The Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT), copyright 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved.

The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE). Copyright © 2021 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved worldwide.

The Revised English Bible (REB), copyright © Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press 1989. All rights reserved.

The Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible, copyright 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A complete catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

The internet addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers in this book are accurate at the time of publication. They are provided as a resource. The Foundry Publishing® does not endorse them or vouch for their content or permanence.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

PART I

INTRODUCING HEBREWS AND THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

Most Christians are familiar with the two major parts of the New Testament: the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. The Acts of the Apostles, standing between these two collections, supplies a lively narrative of the apostolic witness in the earliest days of the church. Placed at the very end of the biblical canon, the book of Revelation has the dubious distinction of being the only document in the New Testament that Christians have obsessed over or, alternately, entirely ignored. Then there are the eight books that come between Paul's letters and the Revelation: Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude. These forgotten books in the back of the Bible are reminiscent of the fabled "Island of Misfit Toys" in the television Christmas classic *Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964). Nobody quite knows what to do with them. They are too often neglected and misunderstood. The reasons for this are complex and constitute what we might call the challenge of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles.

1

The Challenge of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles

The ancient philosopher Antisthenes (ca. 446–ca. 366 BC) was once asked what learning is the most necessary. He replied, "The removal of what one needs to unlearn."[1] Since the rise of historical criticism over three hundred years ago, biblical scholars have learned interpretive habits that need to be unlearned. We will encounter some of them as we explore six challenges related to Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles (CE).

We begin with challenges related to Hebrews and the CE, not because we wish to find fault with them, but because we want to learn how to interpret them better. Before we can formulate an appropriate approach to reading and interpreting Hebrews and the CE, we must acknowledge the elephant in the room: these books have had a checkered history from ancient times until today. They have been susceptible to misunderstanding, neglect, and controversy. It is no wonder one scholar has called them "the ugly stepchildren" of the New Testament (NT).[2] Only once we have grasped their colorful and storied past can we begin to imagine anew how Hebrews and the CE may be appropriated as channels of divine grace and truth for the Christian church today.

The Challenge of Categorization

The formation of the NT canon involved assembling four major "collection units": (1) the Gospels, (2) the Acts of the Apostles and the Catholic Epistles (James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude), (3) Paul's letters (often fourteen

1. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 6.1.7, AT.
2. Blomberg 2016, 463.

in number, including Hebrews), and (4) the Revelation.[3] In chapter 3 we will contemplate the arrangement of Hebrews and the CE in our current Bibles and its significance for interpretation. Presently we will survey some of the ways modern scholarship organizes—or rather, reorganizes—the material in the NT.

Since the advent of historical criticism, scholarly approaches to the Bible have tended to disregard the canonical divisions of the NT. The fourfold Gospel canon (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) has given way to studying the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), on the one hand, and the Fourth Gospel (John), on the other. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are often treated together as Luke's two-volume work (Luke–Acts). It is not uncommon to bring together the Gospel of John and the three Epistles of John (and sometimes Revelation) under a heading such as "Johannine Traditions."[4] The Epistles of Paul are something of an exception. Even a more critical approach that recognizes only seven authentic letters[5] would yet consider the six so-called deutero-Pauline letters[6] as part of the legacy of Paul's theological thinking. Hence, the Pauline corpus holds together, though in an attenuated fashion.[7]

Historical criticism also subjects Hebrews and the CE to its atomistic and disintegrative analysis. Hebrews has long been a castaway from the Pauline corpus. Scholars usually study it as a stand-alone document, having little in common with either the Pauline letters or the CE. Modern scholars virtually never acknowledge the CE as a coherent whole. Scholars generally study each letter in isolation from the others. Of course, the Johannine Epistles (1–3 John) are studied together due to their common stylistic and theological characteristics. Second Peter and Jude are regularly studied in tandem because of the apparent literary relationship between them. Even commentaries that cover 1 and 2 Peter in the same volume often do not treat them as belonging together.

3. Trobisch 2000, 26.
4. For example, Johnson 2010.
5. Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon.
6. Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus.
7. So also Nienhuis and Wall 2013, 9-10n22.

Consequently, scholars usually regard Hebrews and the CE (often along with Revelation) as a mixed bag of documents thrown together at the end of the NT.[8] In introductions to the New Testament, after sections on the Gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters, it is common to find a section labeled "Other New Testament Writings," "Other Canonical Witnesses," "Letters by Other Church Leaders," or "Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles: Non-Pauline Christianity."[9] A recent collection of essays on Hebrews and the CE is appropriately titled *Muted Voices of the New Testament*.[10] David Nienhuis concludes, "Compared to the Gospel and Pauline collections, mainstream contemporary scholarship apparently finds it difficult to think of these seven letters [the CE] as much more than an amorphous grouping of 'other writings' with a limited sense of internal coherence."[11] Moreover, scholars primarily weigh the "otherness" of Hebrews and the CE over against the tacit superiority of the Pauline corpus.

Rarely will one find Hebrews *called* one of the Catholic or General Epistles.[12] Andrew Lincoln identifies Hebrews as "the first of what are frequently called the Catholic epistles," and he places it within the last of four NT divisions: "The Gospels, The Acts of the Apostles, The Letters of Paul, and The General Epistles and Revelation."[13] Such miscategorization creates an added layer of confusion and has no precedent in the ancient reception of the NT books. By the early fourth century, as we will see, Christians recognized *seven* letters in the canonical collection known as "the Catholic Epistles," but Hebrews was not among them.

Modern scholarship has often abandoned the ancient, canonical structure of the NT. Severing or reconfiguring relationships between NT books has surely contributed important insights, but it has also injected a measure of confusion. We propose that interpreters take a second look at Hebrews and the CE in their canonical context. We will pursue this line of inquiry in chapters 2 and 3.

8. Ibid., 5-8.
9. Respectively, Martin 1978; Johnson 2010; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2016; Hagner 2012.
10. Hockey, Pierce, and Watson 2017.
11. Nienhuis 2017, 4.
12. McNeile 1953, 201; Varughese 2005, 298; Bateman 2013, 20.
13. Lincoln 2006, 1.

The Challenge of Authorship

Throughout the history of Christianity, people have questioned the authorship of every single one of our eight documents (Hebrews and the seven CE). The apostolic authorship of 1 Peter and 1 John was accepted as far back as our patristic sources take us (early second c.), but not as readily by many biblical scholars today. Even in ancient times the authorship of the remaining books was scrutinized. In one instance (2 Peter), there was widespread suspicion that the work was pseudonymous. In another (James), there was a claim by "some" that the letter was published by someone else in his name.[14] In other cases, questions focused on the precise identity of the named author.

With respect to the Epistles of James and Jude, the identity of their authors is often dependent on how one construes the makeup of the holy family. Eastern Christians, who believed that James and Jude were the stepbrothers of Jesus via Joseph's previous marriage, acknowledged that each letter was written by a "brother" of the Lord. Western Christians usually followed Jerome's view that these "brothers" of Jesus were really cousins, born of the Virgin's sister, another Mary. Both James and Jude were also numbered among the original twelve apostles: James son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Thaddeus being equivalent to Judas son of James in Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13[15]). Most contemporary scholars identify the implied authors of James and Jude as two half brothers of Jesus among the four listed in Mark 6:3 (// Matt. 13:55), children born to Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus.

Both 2 and 3 John are addressed from a certain "elder." Christians have traditionally attributed the two letters—along with 1 John, the Fourth Gospel, and the Revelation—to the apostle John. Some attributed 2 and 3 John to another John in Ephesus known as John the Elder. Modern scholarship has dished up a smorgasbord of theories on the authorship of the Johannine writings that are too elaborate to survey here.[16]

14. Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 2 (*NPNF*² 3:361).

15. See also Jerome, *Helv.* 15 (*NPNF*² 6:340-41).

16. Especially, Brown 1979, 25-58; Brown 1982, 69-115; for summaries of compositional theories, see Culpepper 1998, 29-41; Burge 2013, 57-76.

The problem of authorship for the Epistle to the Hebrews is well known, as is Origen's oft-repeated pronouncement: "But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows."[17] The Eastern church strongly held to Pauline authorship from as early as the late second century, as evidenced by the inclusion of Hebrews in our earliest surviving collection of Paul's letters (𝔓[46], ca. 200). The Western church equally strongly resisted Pauline authorship until around the turn of the fifth century. Tertullian (d. ca. 225) casually identified Barnabas as the author of Hebrews. Over the centuries many other possibilities proliferated. Among the ancients, common suggestions were Clement of Rome or Luke (as Paul's translator). Martin Luther (1483–1546) famously suggested Apollos. Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) proposed Priscilla (assisted by Aquila), though few scholars have concurred.[18] Since Hebrews is formally anonymous, it is inappropriate to argue that it is a pseudo-Pauline writing, but even this has been proposed.[19]

James, 1–2 Peter, and Jude (whose salutations name an apostle or brother of Jesus as the author) are commonly considered pseudonymous by modern scholars. Issues of authorship are also essential to the upcoming section titled "The Challenge of Canonization" (p. 27).

The Challenge of Setting

Decades ago, William Lane published an article titled "Hebrews: A Sermon in Search of a Setting."[20] There, as well as in his popular[21] and full-length[22] commentaries, Lane proposed a reconstructed setting for Hebrews: it was written to beleaguered Christians in Rome sometime between the great fire of AD 64 and Nero's suicide in AD 68. As plausible as this theory is, there are not enough specific data in Hebrews to identify the time or geographical location of either the author or recipients with any certainty. The question of whether the letter was written before or after the destruction of Jerusalem's temple in AD 70 remains a point of contention. Internal evidence about

17. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.14 (*NPNF*² 1:273).
18. Hoppin 2009.
19. Rothschild 2009.
20. Lane 1985b.
21. Lane 1985a, 21-25.
22. Lane 1991, lx-lxvi.

the letter's setting is frustratingly ambiguous. Take, for example, Hebrews 13:24*b*, "Those from Italy send you their greetings." Does it imply that the original readers were in Rome or that the author was writing from Rome?

John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) held to the earliest known theory regarding the setting of Hebrews. The author (Paul) wrote from Rome to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (and Palestine) who had long suffered at the hands of unbelieving Jews.[23] Since the 1700s, most scholars have argued for a Roman destination for Hebrews, but until more recently there were scholars who suggested Alexandria. As a further indication of the difficulty in nailing down the setting for Hebrews, there is even a debate about whether the recipients were Jewish, Gentile, or a mixed group of Christians. However, the consensus, going back to ancient commentators, is that they were Jewish Christians.

The challenge of determining setting extends to the CE. All but James and 1 Peter provide us with no information about the geographical location of the author or recipients. First John contains no opening address to identify either the author or intended readers. The only concrete reference to the situation addressed by the letter is the allusion to a schism that happened in the community (2:19). Second John is cryptically addressed "To the lady chosen by God and to her children" (v. 1), and 3 John to an otherwise unknown "Gaius" (v. 1). Only church tradition informs us that the author was in Ephesus and that his readers were in churches located somewhere in the Roman province of Asia.

Both 2 Peter and Jude have an address that identifies each letter's recipients in rather generic Christian terms (2 Pet. 1:1; Jude v. 1). In the case of Jude, the traditional view of authorship leads to the inference that the author was centered in Jerusalem and his readers somewhere in Judea, Galilee, and/or Syria. The author's use of Old Testament (OT) Pseudepigrapha (*1 Enoch* and the *Testament of Moses*) may also point to a first-century Judean setting. As for 2 Peter, acknowledging it as Peter's "second letter" (3:1) ties its intended audience to the same five geographical regions listed in 1 Peter 1:1.

James and 1 Peter are the most fully expressive concerning their addressees. Yet fundamental questions remain. James is addressed "To the twelve

23. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Heb.* "Argument and Summary of the Epistle" (*NPNF*[1] 14:363-65).

tribes in the dispersion [*en tē diaspora*]" (James 1:1, NRSVUE). But does this mean that James was writing to all Jews in the Diaspora? Or was he addressing himself only to Christian Jews? Or is the phrase "the twelve tribes in the dispersion" an appropriation of a stock Jewish identity marker to refer to all Christians, whether Jew or Gentile?

Likewise, Peter's address "To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion [*diasporas*]" (1 Pet. 1:1, ESV) could relate to either Jewish or Gentile Christians. All three descriptors ("elect," "exiles," "Dispersion") belong to the heritage of Israel as depicted in the OT. The "Dispersion" has been subject to varying interpretations. Does it refer to Jewish Christians who live outside the promised land? Or is the author applying the "Dispersion"—historically related to the deportation of Judeans to Babylon (sixth c. BC)—to Gentile Christians who have experienced a kind of exile of their own? Many interpreters take the expression in a metaphorical sense to refer to the way believers live as exiles within wider Roman society. Others go even further to take it in the sense that believers are currently exiled from their true home in heaven.

We could write at length about the setting for each of our eight letters, but what we have presented here is enough to show that drawing up a complete picture of the occasion and setting for each letter is a considerable challenge.

The Challenge of Genre

Traditionally, all of Hebrews and the CE are called "letters" or "epistles." Understanding the epistolary genre of these NT documents is crucial to their interpretation.

Five of our biblical books are easily identifiable as ancient letters: 1–2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude. They have all three major components of an ancient letter: (1) letter opening with an address (sender to receiver) and greeting, (2) letter body, and (3) letter closing with concluding greetings or (in 2 Peter and Jude) a closing doxology. In its letter opening, 1 Peter also contains a thanksgiving or blessing (1:3-9), such as we find in Paul's letters.

The most neglected books of the NT are 2–3 John and Jude, in part due to their brevity (2 John: 245 words; 3 John: 219 words; Jude: 461 words).[24] Ironically, their small size is what makes them most like other ancient letters, which averaged about 87 words.[25] Even these letters exceed the average length; the rest of the NT letters far exceed it. The Letter to the Hebrews is the third largest letter in the NT (4,953 words) behind Romans (7,111 words) and 1 Corinthians (6,829 words).[26]

Hebrews and James present a kind of mirror image in epistolary form. Whereas James opens with a customary address and greeting, Hebrews does not. While James does not contain a standard letter closing, Hebrews contains the most extensive epistolary closing of any of our eight documents, complete with a benediction (13:20-21), final exhortation (v. 22), travelogue (v. 23), and closing greetings (vv. 24-25). Both Hebrews and James are similar in that their remaining bulk consists of exhortations (paraenesis) and teaching. Both are indebted to the patterns of logical argumentation from Greco-Roman rhetoric, though Hebrews does so with greater sophistication. James draws deeply from the Hebrew wisdom tradition. Scholars often identify each as either a homily or series of smaller homilies. The author of Hebrews identifies his own work as a "word of exhortation" (13:22), an expression used to label Paul's synagogue sermon in Acts 13:15.

First John poses the greatest challenge to determining its genre. It contains virtually no epistolary features whatsoever, apart from the author's frequent first-person references to writing (13x) and his affectionate address to his readers throughout ("Dear friends" [*agapētoi*], 6x). It has no standard letter opening (address and greeting) or closing (e.g., final greeting). Rather, it begins with a prologue (1:1-4)[27] and ends with a terse, final exhortation (5:21). Thus some scholars reach for the lowest common denominator by

24. See Just 2005.

25. Bateman 2013, 25.

26. Just 2005.

27. Among NT letters, only Hebrews and 1 John begin with a prologue, and both commence with a period—that is, a sentence composed of carefully balanced clauses (Heb. 1:1-4; 1 John 1:1-3*a*).

dubbing 1 John a "writing"[28] or "paper."[29] I. Howard Marshall concludes that it is a "written sermon or pastoral address."[30]

The Challenge of Theological Difficulties

Theological conundrums abound in the Bible. Often a given theological problem or puzzle exists more in the eye of the beholder or in the misunderstanding of the reader than in a fair-minded and informed interpretation of the text. Hebrews and the CE have their share of theological difficulties—some rankling readers since ancient times and others emerging solely among modern readers.

A primary theological difficulty in Hebrews is its strong impression on readers that they could lose their salvation. The letter contains five severe warnings against apostasy (2:1-4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29).[31] Since the Reformation, Protestants have wrangled over whether the warnings deal with a projected falling away from the faith that is serious and real (an Arminian or Wesleyan interpretation) or are merely rhetorical or hypothetical (a common Reformed or Calvinist interpretation).

What bothered ancient Christians, however, was the repeated claim of Hebrews that apostasy is irreversible, a second repentance impossible (6:4; 12:17). An early Christian writer, the Shepherd of Hermas (ca. 150), relaxed the rigorist position of Hebrews by allowing one postbaptismal opportunity for repentance from sin.[32] Tertullian railed against "that apocryphal 'Shepherd' of adulterers" and cited Hebrews 6:1, 4-6 in support of his position that there is no "second repentance" after baptism for serious sins such as fornication and adultery.[33] Montanists in the second century and Novatians in the third employed Hebrews to authorize their belief that Christians who had renounced their faith under persecution could not be restored to salvation or be readmitted into the church. So, in addition to doubts about the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, the writing's misappropriation by sectarians

28. Johnson 1993, 13.
29. Smalley 2015, xxxiii.
30. Marshall 1978, 14.
31. See Bateman 2007.
32. *Herm. Mand*. 4.3.1-7; see *Herm. Vis.* 2.2.4-5.
33. Tertullian, *Pud.* 20.

contributed to its rejection in the West.[34] In truth, Hebrews's concern about a point-of-no-return apostasy does not match the third-century controversies over the church's proper response to lapsed Christians who sought restoration.[35]

According to certain past interpreters, the Epistle of James presents theological difficulties of the highest order. There are two significant matters: a deficient Christology and an aberrant doctrine of salvation. The first, a deficient Christology, has mostly to do with what is *lacking* in James. The letter only mentions the "Lord Jesus Christ" twice (1:1; 2:1), and the other references to "the Lord" (*ho kyrios*) more likely concern God than Christ. Some scholars have proposed that James was originally a thoroughly Jewish work and that the references to the "Lord Jesus Christ" are later Christian interpolations. Virtually no one accepts this view today.[36] There is no textual evidence to support it. Yet it gives one pause to find, as Luther observed, that James "does not once mention the Passion, the Resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ."[37] The author is keen to provide his readers with wisdom teaching about righteous living, but he never holds up Jesus as the example. He points instead to OT figures such as Abraham (James 2:21, 23), Rahab (v. 25), Job (5:11), and Elijah (v. 17).

We can make two quick points in response to these difficulties. First, the two references to Jesus (1:1; 2:1) encapsulate a high Christology, since Jesus is designated as both "Lord" and "Christ." The expression "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" may be rendered "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (2:1, ESV; cf. KJV, RSV). Other translations such as "Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord" (NJB) and the paraphrastic "our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been resurrected in glory" (CEB) capture the sense that Jesus Christ is the incarnate, crucified, risen, and exalted Lord. Second, while James never invokes the life of Jesus as an ethical example, the letter's ethical instruction is saturated with Jesus's wisdom teaching, especially from the Sermon on the Mount.[38] The

34. Gamble 1985, 52; Koester 2001, 23. Gaius, a presbyter in Rome (early third c.), did not accept Hebrews in response to the Montanists' use of it (Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 48; see also Metzger 1987, 102). Philaster (d. ca. 397) reported that churches in the West did not read Hebrews because it lent itself to the Novatians' false view on repentance (*Haer.* 89).

35. See Anderson 2013, 190-91, 204-10.

36. See Davids 1982, 3, 5; Moo 2000, 12.

37. *LW* 35:395.

38. deSilva 2018, 725.

strong Jewish flavor of James speaks to its early Judean origins, while our two points about the identity and ethical teaching of Jesus favor its unambiguously *Christian* character.

The second theological difficulty in James has to do with the doctrine of salvation. We will have the opportunity to deal with this problem in chapter 6, so here we will focus on the problem itself without proposing any solution. James appears to contradict Paul's statements that salvation is by faith and *not* works (Rom. 3:27-28; 4:1-10; Gal. 2:16; 3:1-14; Eph. 2:8-9). James states that a faith that saves (2:14) is one that cooperates with and is perfected by works (v. 22). It is important to note that during the centuries of canon formation the church did not see Paul and James as contradictory but rather complementary on this point. Then, in the early sixteenth century, Martin Luther championed the doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone)—an expression that does not occur in Paul (except in Luther's rendering of Rom. 3:28!); however, it does appear in James, but only to be negated: "You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and *not* by faith alone" (James 2:24, italics added). Luther famously characterized James as "an epistle of straw" because "it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it."[39] More specifically, Luther stated that James "is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works."[40] On another occasion, Luther lashed out at James because of its use by papists, writing, "I almost feel like throwing Jimmy into the stove."[41]

Perhaps the most curious theological difficulty is in 1 Peter. The author asserts that before Christ's heavenly exaltation (3:22), he "made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits" (v. 19). Three interpretations of this text have prevailed.[42] The first is the view that the preincarnate Christ preached through Noah to spirits who are now imprisoned in hell. A second view, reflected in the Apostles' Creed, is that Christ descended into hades to preach grace (and release) to imprisoned spirits who had disobeyed in the time of Noah. The third view is that Christ announced ultimate defeat to fallen angels who had

39. *LW* 35:362.
40. Ibid., 396-97.
41. *LW* 34:317; see Althaus 1966, 81.
42. Jobes 2011, 313.

been kept in chains in anticipation of being judged for leading Noah's generation into sin. This last view enjoys wide support among modern scholars because of its parallels to material in *1 Enoch*, also echoed in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude v. 6.

We have already observed that 2 Peter had difficulty making it into the canon due to doubts about its authenticity (i.e., apostolic authorship). Though 2 Peter 1:4 expressly underwrites the Eastern church's doctrine of *theosis* and is "the high-water mark of the Christian revelation,"[43] a troubling theological problem presents itself in the third chapter of the letter. The sixth-century Nestorian monk, Cosmas Indicopleustes, wrote the eccentric work *Christian Topography* (ca. 547). In it he strenuously opposes a purported theological falsehood that could be derived from 2 Peter 3:7-13—that the present cosmos will be annihilated and replaced by new heavens and a new earth.[44] Following longstanding Eastern tradition, Cosmas interprets 2 Peter 3 to mean transformation and purification rather than dissolution. He uses 1 Corinthians 7:31 ("For the form [*to schēma*] of this world is passing away" [NASB1995]) as the skeleton key for unlocking such problem texts (including Ps. 102:26-28; Rev. 20:11; 21:1).[45] But for Cosmas, his ace in the hole against 2 Peter 3 is the letter's doubtful canonicity. Only the three greater CE (James, 1 Peter, and 1 John) were accepted by Syrian Christians.

Even the beloved letters of John—which tradition ascribes to the "Apostle of Love," John the son of Zebedee—contain some thorny issues. First John promotes a strong moralism that one could readily interpret as sinless perfection (2:1*a*; 3:6, 8, 9; 5:18; but see 1:8, 10; 5:16-17). The possibility of believers having "perfect love" (4:18; see 2:5; 4:12, 17) appealed to John Wesley (1703-91) and became one of the foundation stones for his doctrine of Christian perfection.[46] But interpreters of every stripe have struggled mightily to make sense of the Johannine teachings concerning the Christian's relationship to sin[47] (see ch. 7). What compounds the trouble for modern readers in

43. Bruce 1988, 251.

44. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Top.* 10.

45. Irenaeus (*Haer.* 5.35.2; 5.36.1 [*ANF* 1:566]) was likely the first to marshal 1 Corinthians 7:31 as a key text in opposition to the Valentinian Gnostic doctrine of cosmic destruction.

46. Wesley 2015.

47. Brown 1982, 411-16; Kruse 2000, 126-32.

a pluralistic society is that such high morality and the accentuation of perfect love stand side by side with an inflexible theological exclusivism.[48] Worse yet, such exclusivity comes to expression in actual schism (2:19) and the elder's direct command to refuse hospitality to itinerant teachers who do not conform to orthodoxy (2 John v. 9)—a favor returned by his nemesis, Diotrephes (3 John vv. 9-10).

Jude is the only NT book that appeals to material from the so-called Pseudepigrapha. The Pseudepigrapha are works, often written under the pseudonyms of ancient Hebrew worthies, that expand the OT's historical, prophetic, apocalyptic, and wisdom literature. Written during the intertestamental period, none of these writings (with few exceptions) is considered part of canonical Scripture by any Jewish or Christian group.[49] Jude alludes to a story in *1 Enoch* 6–8 (Jude v. 6), another in the *Assumption of Moses* (Jude v. 9), and quotes *1 Enoch* 1.9 as a prophetic oracle (Jude vv. 14-15). This obviously raises the theological question about the boundaries of the biblical canon. According to Jerome, many rejected Jude because he quotes from the spurious book of *Enoch*.[50] Tertullian (d. ca. 225), however, held to *1 Enoch* as an authoritative prophecy. Thus the fact that Jude quotes *1 Enoch* presents decisive evidence for Jude's authenticity.[51] With this little conundrum about Jude and noncanonical *1 Enoch*, we appropriately turn to the final challenge concerning Hebrews and the CE: their canonization.

The Challenge of Canonization

The church's confession today concerning the twenty-seven books of the NT is unwavering and has been so for many centuries. It is quite a different matter when certain individuals or movements neglect certain biblical books and privilege others, thereby setting up a "canon within the canon." Examples of this impulse are Luther's demotion of Hebrews, James, Jude,

48. Culpepper 1998, 299-303.

49. For the OT Pseudepigrapha, see Charlesworth 1983-85; Bauckham, Davila, and Panayotov 2013. The Pseudepigrapha should not be confused with the Apocrypha. Also composed during the intertestamental period, the books (or parts of books) in the Apocrypha made their way into the Christian Bible via their inclusion in the Greek version of the OT, the Septuagint (LXX). Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians accept the Apocrypha as part of the biblical canon (though of secondary authority, i.e., "deuterocanonical") while most Protestants reject them.

50. Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 4 (*NPNF*^{2} 3:362).

51. Tertullian, *Cult. fem.* 1.3 (*ANF* 4:15-16).

and Revelation in the sixteenth century and, in the twentieth century, Ernst Käsemann's estimation of 2 Peter as "perhaps the most dubious writing in the canon."[52]

Isolated doubt about the relative value of a given NT book falls far short of an authoritative conciliar decision about the canon. Therefore, the *canonicity* of none of the twenty-seven books of the NT is currently in question. But the process of *canonization* during the first four or five Christian centuries was certainly untidy and for a time left the status of some books in jeopardy. The messiness of the process was in no small part related to the books we are presently studying.[53]

Hebrews

The canonicity of Hebrews may well have become a fait accompli sometime in the second century. At that time a Christian scribe in Egypt included Hebrews in an edition of Paul's letters. From around AD 200 onward, the place of Hebrews among Paul's Epistles—and therefore in the NT canon—was certain among Eastern Christians.

Our earliest evidence of the knowledge and usage of Hebrews comes from the West. The author of *1 Clement* (before 70 or ca. 96)[54] clearly incorporates material from Hebrews, though never explicitly identifies its author or acknowledges it as Scripture. *First Clement* 36:1-6 echoes Hebrews's majestic opening (esp. Heb. 1:3-4, 7, 13) and relies on "its distinctive presentation of Jesus as Son and high priest."[55] In the mid-second century, both the Shepherd of Hermas and Justin Martyr knew and used Hebrews. Justin calls Christ an "Apostle,"[56] such as only Hebrews does in the NT (Heb. 3:1).

52. Käsemann 1964, 169.

53. Our discussion of the reception of the books of Hebrews and the CE into the canon is necessarily brief. Readers may consult the major studies on the biblical canon for further information (Westcott 1896; Souter 1913; Lohse 1981; Bruce 1988; Metzger 1987; McDonald 2017, esp. 2:257-62 on Hebrews and the CE). Biblical commentaries will often include an introductory section about a book's canonization (e.g., for Hebrews: Lane 1991, cl-clv; Ellingworth 1993, 34-36; Koester 2001, 19-27). One may now also consult extensive treatments of the canonical history of the CE (Schlosser 2004; Nienhuis 2007, 29-97; Nienhuis and Wall 2013, 17-39, 77-79, 108-14, 171-74, 223-25; Lockett 2017, 59-90).

54. Thomas J. Herron (1989 and 2008) has made an argument for a pre-AD 70 date for *1 Clement*, considered persuasive by the notable expert on the Apostolic Fathers, Clayton Jefford (2006, 18-19). The consensus view is that *1 Clement* was written ca. AD 96 during the reign of Emperor Domitian.

55. Lane 1991, cli-clii.

56. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 12, 63 (*ANF* 1:166, 184).

The earliest canonical list, the Muratorian Canon (ca. 175–ca. 200), lacks Hebrews. Around this same time, Irenaeus (ca. 135–ca. 202) comments on Hebrews in a nonextant work.[57] In Irenaeus's work *Against Heresies*, he refers to God's creation "by the word of his power," echoing Hebrews 1:3.[58] Hippolytus (ca. 176–ca. 236) seems to have known Hebrews, as well.[59] Photius (ca. 810–ca. 895) later reports that both Irenaeus and Hippolytus rejected the Pauline authorship of Hebrews,[60] an opinion shared by their contemporary, Gaius of Rome (ca. 200).[61] As for the early Latin theologians in Carthage, North Africa: Tertullian (d. ca. 225) idiosyncratically attributes Hebrews to Barnabas,[62] while Cyprian (d. 258) shows no familiarity with it whatsoever.

The earliest evidence of an Eastern tradition about the Pauline authorship of Hebrews springs from Alexandria in the early third century. The oldest extant codex containing Paul's letters, $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ (ca. 200), includes Hebrews immediately after Romans. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 155-ca. 220), following his teacher Pantaenus (d. ca. 200), provides explanations for the presence of Hebrews among the Pauline letters, despite its formal, stylistic, and missional departures from the Apostle to the Gentiles. According to Clement, Paul omitted his usual prescript, "Paul the Apostle," so as neither to be off-putting to a suspicious Hebrew audience nor to trespass beyond the boundaries of his apostolic mission among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-9). Hebrews's deviation from Paul's writing style may be explained by the theory that Paul originally wrote in Hebrew, which Luke (or Clement of Rome) then translated into Greek.[63] For Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254), however, Hebrews's superior style makes Pauline authorship unlikely, though its contents belong to Paul's thought world. Ultimately, Origen happily counts Hebrews among Paul's writings while remaining agnostic about who wrote it.[64]

57. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.26.3 (*NPNF*² 1:244-45).
58. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 2.30.9 (*ANF* 1:406).
59. Westcott 1896, 387.
60. Hippolytus, *Bibliotheca*, codices 121, 232.
61. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.20.3 (*NPNF*² 1:268).
62. Tertullian, *Pud.* 20; de Boer 2014.
63. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.2-4 (*NPNF*² 1:261); see 3.38.2-3; 6:25.14 (*NPNF*² 1:169, 273).
64. Ibid., 6.25.11-14 (*NPNF*² 1:273).

Eusebius (early fourth c.) regards Paul's fourteen Epistles—including Hebrews—as "obvious and plain."[65] Yet he is careful to acknowledge that the church of Rome rejected Hebrews as not being written by Paul.[66] Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 296–373) is the first to list the twenty-seven books of our NT (no more, no less) in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* of AD 367, placing Hebrews among Paul's "fourteen Epistles." During his exile in Rome (early 340s), Athanasius may have influenced Roman acceptance of Hebrews as an authentic letter of Paul's.[67] Western theologians who spent considerable time in the East, such as Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-ca. 367), Rufinus (ca. 345–411), and Jerome (ca. 345–420), helped to push Western opinion about the canonicity of Hebrews to align with that of the East.

Even late in the fourth century, the Eastern churchman Amphilochius of Iconium (ca. 340-ca. 395) finds it necessary to bat away doubts about Hebrews as "spurious," insisting that "its grace is genuine."[68] Meanwhile, Jerome and Augustine (354–430) decisively steer the West toward acceptance of Hebrews into the canon, despite their doubts about its Pauline authorship. Accordingly, both list Hebrews at the end of the Pauline corpus, after Philemon.[69] Over his lifetime, Augustine became increasingly convinced that Hebrews is anonymous.[70] Jerome shared this decoupling of canonicity from authorship.[71] He noted its ancient acceptance in the East as Pauline, as well as alternative views of authorship (Clement or Barnabas), but then declared, "And it makes no difference whose it is, since it is from a churchman, and is celebrated in the daily readings of the Churches."[72]

The Western view of Hebrews at the end of the fourth century—that is, as canonical, even if not written by Paul—is reflected in the Third Council of Carthage (397; mirroring the Council of Hippo in 393). The canon list includes "the Epistles of Paul, thirteen; of the same to Hebrews, one Epistle."[73]

65. Ibid., 3.3.5 (LCL).
66. Ibid., 3.3.5; 6.20.3 (*NPNF*^{2} 1:134, 268).
67. Bruce 1988, 221.
68. Amphilochius of Iconium, *Seleuc.* lines 308-9; Bruce 1988, 213.
69. Jerome, *Epist.* 53.9 (*NPNF*^{2} 6:101); Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 2.8.13 (*NPNF*^{1} 2:539).
70. Souter 1913, 191.
71. Bruce 1988, 227, 232.
72. Jerome, *Epist.* 129.3; Lincoln 2006, 4.
73. Metzger 1987, 315.

The Sixth Council of Carthage (419) erased the line of separation between Hebrews and the Pauline letters, listing "Fourteen Epistles of Paul."[74] However, it could not eradicate the persistent reservations about Pauline authorship in the West, which the likes of Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin would fan into flame in the sixteenth century.

The Catholic Epistles

When Eusebius completed his *Ecclesiastical History* (ca. 325), two facts about the NT canon had become certain since the time of Origen (d. 254). First, twenty-seven books could be enumerated among "the writings of the New Testament."[75] Second, in the interval between Origen and Eusebius, the seven letters—James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude—were formed into a collection under the name "Catholic Epistles."[76] However, Eusebius's knowledge of historical sources and current church practice made it clear that the tally of NT books varied. Some churches and prominent church leaders regarded fewer than twenty-seven books to be authoritative. Others were using additional books besides them. A parade example is the great uncial manuscript from the fourth century, Codex Sinaiticus, which contains all twenty-seven NT books but appends the *Epistle of Barnabas* and a large portion of the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

Consequently, Eusebius was obliged to categorize books in such a way as to reflect the complexity of the situation.[77] His system of classification, a modification of Origen's,[78] differentiates several classes of books.[79]

The first category includes "accepted" or "recognized" books (homologoumena): the Gospels, Acts, Epistles of Paul (including Hebrews), 1 John, 1 Peter, and (tentatively) the Apocalypse of John. Thus the church widely acknowledged twenty-one or twenty-two books of the NT in the early fourth

74. Ibid., 238.

75. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 3.25.1-3 (*NPNF*² 1:155-56).

76. Ibid., 2.23.25 (*NPNF*² 1:128).

77. Ibid., 3.25.1-7 (*NPNF*² 1:155-57).

78. Lohse 1981, 23-24.

79. Eusebius's classification is not altogether clear. The following scholars have made a reasonably coherent construal of his categories: Lohse 1981, 23-24; Metzger 1987, 203-6; Bruce 1988, 198-200; Nienhuis 2007, 63-70; see also the dated but full discussion by Lawler and Oulton (Eusebius 1927-28, 2:100-104).

century. Elsewhere Eusebius refers to such books as "unquestionable" and "acknowledged by all."[80]

Eusebius's second category involves "disputed" books (antilegomena), but these books fall into two subcategories: (1) books that "nevertheless are recognized [*gnōrimōn*] by many"[81] and (2) books that are "rejected" (*noutha*).[82] Books both "disputed" yet "recognized by many" are James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2–3 John. "Rejected" books are the *Acts of Paul*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Didache*, Apocalypse of John, and *Gospel of the Hebrews*.

Eusebius's third category includes apocryphal books that claim apostolic authorship or association.[83] Eusebius does not give a label to this category but comes close to it when he states that these books do not even rise to the level of the "rejected" books; they must rather be *paraitēteon*—that is, "cast aside."[84] These books do not have a literary style that is apostolic, nor do their contents align with orthodoxy. They are heretical fabrications.

Three points about Eusebius's classification of books are germane to our study. First, Hebrews is silently positioned among Paul's fourteen epistles in the category of universally "recognized" books (first category), even though Eusebius was well aware that it was contested, particularly in Rome. Second, two of the CE, 1 Peter and 1 John, are listed as universally "recognized" books (first category), while the remaining five CE (James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude) constitute entirely the subclass of books that are "disputed" though "recognized by many" (second category, subcategory 1). Third, Eusebius places the Apocalypse of John in *both* the first category ("recognized") *and* subcategory 2 of the second category ("rejected")!

1 Peter and 1 John

It is not surprising that 1 Peter and 1 John are among the universally acknowledged books. They are attested in some of our earliest Christian

80. Eusebius, *Hist eccl.* 3.3.7 (Eusebius 1927-28, 1:66).
81. Ibid., 3.25.3.
82. Ibid., 3.25.4-5.
83. Ibid., 3.25.6-7.
84. Ibid., 3.25.7 (*NPNF*[1] 1:157).

sources, the Apostolic Fathers. We find echoes of both letters in the *Epistle of Barnabas*[85] and rather clear usage of them by Polycarp.[86] Eusebius confirms the knowledge of both letters in Asia Minor in the early second century, for he states that Papias (a contemporary of Polycarp) employed testimonies from 1 John and 1 Peter.[87] Late in the second century, Irenaeus is the first to cite both 1 Peter[88] and 1 John by name.[89] Interestingly, Irenaeus does not seem to distinguish between 1 and 2 John, leading scholars to believe that he viewed them as one book[90] or 2 John as a "covering letter" for 1 John.[91] Clement of Alexandria cites 1 John as "the larger Epistle," implying at least one other letter.[92] By the third century, 1 John makes its mark in the Latin West, while attestation for 1 Peter is scarce, as evidenced by its omission from the Muratorian Canon. Tertullian quotes 1 John forty or fifty times[93] but 1 Peter only twice.[94] Both 1 Peter and 1 John are acknowledged as undisputed writings by Origen in the early third century[95] and by Eusebius in the early fourth.[96]

James, 2 Peter, and 2–3 John

It is also not surprising that James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude end up in Eusebius's "disputed" category. Undeniable testimony to the existence of James does not occur until Origen (d. 254).[97] Even late in the fourth century, Jerome reports that some believed it had been written by someone else in James's name.[98] Scholars disagree on whether there are any echoes of James in the earlier writings of *1 Clement* or the *Shepherd of Hermas* (among others). There is one possibly clear allusion to James 2:23 in Irenaeus,[99] and Clement

85. *Barn*. 5.6 (// 1 Pet. 1:2); 5.9-11 and 12:10 (// 1 John 4:2); 14.5 (// 1 John 3:4, 7, 8); see Brown 1982, 7.

86. Pol. *Phil.* 1.3 (// 1 Pet. 1:8, 12); 2.1 (// 1 Pet. 1:13, 21); 8.1-2 (// 1 Pet. 2:21, 22, 24; 4:16); 10.2 (// 1 Pet. 2:12); 7:1 (// 1 John 3:8; 4:2-3); 7:2 (// 1 John 2:7, 24; 3:11); see Michaels 1988, xxxii; Brown 1982, 9. Given the bulk of allusions, Metzger (1987, 62) states that Polycarp "must have known [1 Peter] practically by heart."

87. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.17 (*NPNF*² 1:173).

88. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.9.2; 4.16.5; 5.7.2 (*ANF* 1:472, 482, 533).

89. Ibid., 1.16.3; 3.16.5, 8 (*ANF* 1:342, 442-43).

90. Brown 1982, 10.

91. Painter 2002, 42.

92. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 2.15 (*ANF* 2:362).

93. Brown 1982, 10.

94. Westcott 1896, 269n2.

95. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.5, 8, 10 (*NPNF*² 1:273).

96. Ibid., 3.3.1; 3.25.1-2 (*NPNF*² 1:133, 155-56).

97. Origen, *Comm. Jo*. 19.6; Origen, *Hom. Exod.* 15.25.

98. Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 2 (*NPNF*² 3:361).

99. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.16.2 (*ANF* 1:481).

of Alexandria may have written a commentary on all of the CE, including James;[100] but both claims are disputed.[101] The doubtful status of James in the East was already dissipating when Eusebius was writing his *Ecclesiastical History*, for elsewhere he cites it as an authoritative writing[102] or "Scripture" coming from "the holy Apostle."[103] From the time of Eusebius forward, "every major church father (Cyril, Athanasius, Epiphanius, Gregory [of Nyssa], and Amphilochius) and codex of the NT (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus) place James as the lead letter in a collection of seven called 'catholic.'"[104]

Though for centuries James was scarcely used in the West and is missing from the Muratorian Canon (ca. 175–ca. 200), suddenly at the turn of the fifth century its canonical place became certain there too. During his exiles in Gaul (335/336) and Rome (337-46), Athanasius may have inclined the West toward acceptance of Hebrews and the five disputed CE.[105] It is even possible that Athanasius *introduced* James to the West.[106] Latin fathers such as Hilary of Poitiers (d. ca. 367), Ambrosiaster (late 4th c.), and Jerome and Augustine were pivotal in securing James's place within the canon.

Second Peter's canonical status was precarious all the way up to the time when Athanasius wrote his famous canon list in AD 367. The *Apocalypse of Peter* (ca. 110-ca. 140) may have used 2 Peter, and though there *might* be echoes of it in the Apostolic Fathers,[107] Origen is the first to express direct knowledge of it—though as a disputed letter.[108] The earliest manuscript to contain 2 Peter (as well as 1 Peter and Jude) is 𝔓^{72}, which may have been copied in Origen's lifetime.[109] It was once thought that Didymus the Blind (ca. 313-98), in a commentary on the CE dubiously attributed to him, marked 2 Peter as "counterfeit."[110] However, the discovery of attested commentaries by Didymus in 1941 at Toura, south of Cairo, reveals his use of 2 Peter as

100. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.1 (*NPNF*^{2} 1:261).
101. On Irenaeus, see Nienhuis 2007, 36; on Clement, see Nienhuis 2007, 48-50; Lockett 2017, 73-75.
102. Eusebius, *Eccl. theol.* 2.25.3; 3.2.12.
103. Eusebius, *Comm. Ps.*, PG 23:505.7-8; 23:1244.34; thus Westcott 1896, 432n2; Mayor 1910, lxvii.
104. Ninehuis and Wall 2013, 78.
105. Bruce 1988, 223.
106. Yates 2004.
107. Picirilli 1988. Regarding the *Apocalypse of Peter*, a recent study argues, rather, that 2 Peter made use of it (Grünstäudl 2013).
108. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.8 (*NPNF*^{2} 1:273).
109. Bruce 1988, 193; Lockett 2017, 81-82.
110. Bray 2000, 157-58.

"authentic and authoritative."[111] In the great fourth-century codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, it is ensconced among the twenty-seven NT books, and beyond the time of Athanasius's canonical list, any doubts expressed about it are isolated. Jerome is aware of skepticism concerning the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter due to its stylistic differences from 1 Peter[112] but offers the explanation that Peter used different amanuenses.[113]

The presence of 2 John was not strongly felt until the late second century, and that of 3 John was not felt at all until the early third century. Irenaeus is the first to quote 2 John as the work of "John, the disciple of the Lord"[114] but later quotes from both 1 and 2 John as from the selfsame letter.[115] The Muratorian Canon's reference in line 68 to "two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John" is difficult to decipher. Most scholars believe that 1–2 John are intended by the wording,[116] but some read the evidence to mean that 2–3 John are being referenced in addition to the aforementioned 1 John quoted in lines 29-31.[117] In any case, Origen is the first to bear unambiguous witness to the grouping of all three Johannine Epistles, though reporting doubts about the authenticity of 2–3 John.[118] Origen's successor, Dionysius of Alexandria (d. ca. 264), distinguishes between "the Catholic Epistle" (i.e., 1 John) and "the reputed" 2–3 John.[119] Eusebius places 2–3 John among the "disputed" books due to the question of whether they were written by "the evangelist" or "another person of the same name."[120]

Among Latin theologians there are no definite references to 3 John until Jerome and Augustine. Even after all three epistles were included in the major canon lists in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, scholars could still register the persistent suggestion that 2–3 John were possibly authored by a certain John the Elder rather than the apostle John.[121]

111. Metzger 1987, 213; see Ehrman 1983.
112. Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 1 (*NPNF*² 3:361).
113. Jerome, *Epist.* 120.11.
114. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.16.3 (*ANF* 1:342).
115. Ibid., 3.16.5, 8 (*ANF* 1:442-43).
116. Manson 1947, 32-33; Bruce 1979, 18-19.
117. Lightfoot 1904, 99-10; Moffatt 1918, 478-79; supplementary note to Eusebius, *Eccl. hist.* 3.24.17 (*NPNF*² 1:388); Katz 1957.
118. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.10 (*NPNF*² 1:273).
119. Ibid., 7.25.7, 10-11 (*NPNF*² 1:310).
120. Ibid., 6.25.3 (*NPNF*² 1:156); see 6:24.17 (*NPNF*² 1:154).
121. Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 9; Bede the Venerable 1985, 231.

Jude

Finally, we come to the canon history of the Epistle of Jude. There may be faint echoes of Jude in second-century Christian works,[122] but none distinct enough to indicate literary dependence.[123] If we assume the priority of Jude to 2 Peter, the earliest witness to Jude is 2 Peter (before AD 64 or, if pseudepigraphic, before AD 140).[124] Around the turn of the third century we find Jude in wide circulation: as far as Italy (Muratorian Canon) and Carthage (Tertullian) in the West, and Egypt in the East (Clement of Alexandria and Origen). Eusebius tells us that Clement of Alexandria in his (now lost) *Outlines* commented briefly on "all canonical Scripture, not omitting the disputed books," including "Jude and the other Catholic epistles."[125] Clement, as far as we know, is the first to quote from Jude by name.[126] Origen highly praises Jude as "a letter of a few lines . . . but filled with the healthful words of heavenly grace,"[127] and yet he also implies that it was not universally accepted.[128] Around AD 213 in Carthage, Tertullian quotes Jude as authoritative,[129] but later Cyprian (d. 258) does not make use of any of the five disputed CE.[130] In the early fourth century, Eusebius reports the scanty attestation to Jude's letter among the ancients.[131] This cause for hesitation is traded for other qualms even as the letter is achieving a place among the great codices and canon lists of the fourth and fifth centuries. As the division between canonical and noncanonical books becomes increasingly defined, Jude's own use of pseudepigraphal books becomes less tenable. It is incumbent upon a Greek commentator (previously mistaken for Didymus the Blind) to defend Jude's appropriation of the *Testament* (or *Assumption*) *of Moses*[132] and upon Jerome[133] and Augustine[134] to defend its appeal to *1 Enoch*. Charles Bigg wryly opines,

122. Guthrie 1990, 901, relying on Bigg 1901, 307-8.
123. Bauckham 1983, 16.
124. See Davids 2006, 130-31.
125. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.1 (*NPNF*² 1:261); see also 6.13.6 (*NPNF*² 1:260).
126. Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.8.44-45; *Strom.* 3.2.11 (*ANF* 2:282, 383).
127. Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.17.40-43 (*ANF* 9:424).
128. Ibid., 17.30.82-83.
129. Tertullian, *Pud.* 20.
130. Metzger 1987, 161-62; Bruce 1988, 184-85.
131. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.25.
132. PG 38:1811-18; see Mayor 1907, cxv; McDonald 2017, 262.
133. Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 4 (*NPNF*² 3:362).
134. Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 15.23 (*NPNF*¹ 2:305).

"The offence of Jude was not so much that he made use of *Enoch*, as that he actually quoted the book by name."[135]

The Catholic Epistles in the Syrian Canon

Before concluding our brief canonical history of the CE, it is necessary to mention the status of these books in the ancient Syrian churches.[136] In the fifth century the Syriac Bible, the Peshitta, included the three greater CE (James, 1 Peter, 1 John). The four smaller CE (2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude) and Revelation were excluded, leaving twenty-two books in the Syrian canon of the NT. The sixth-century Philoxenian version brought the Syriac NT into line with Greek manuscripts, thus adding in the smaller CE and Revelation.

Nevertheless, to this day the Church of the East (Nestorian) rejects the smaller CE. In the sixth century, the Nestorian theologian Paulus listed James along with the lesser CE and Revelation as books of inferior authority. Around AD 850, Isho'dad of Merv wrote a commentary on the twenty-two-book Syrian NT but rejected even the greater CE.[137] There were Greek-speaking Christians in the East who were influenced by the Syrian canon. John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) appears to have held to the same NT canon as in the Peshitta, for among his eleven thousand quotations from the NT, there are none from 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, or Revelation.[138] Note, too, Amphilochius's awareness that some receive seven CE and others only three.[139]

Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, and Eusebius's Canonical Categories

We are now in a position to consider Eusebius's curious categorization of the NT books. Why does Hebrews rest securely among the universally acknowledged books, while the CE are divided between the acknowledged (1 Peter and 1 John) and the disputed (James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude) books? Why does Eusebius distinguish between two subcategories of disputed books

135. Bigg (1901, 310).
136. Metzger 1987, 218-23.
137. Bray 2000, xxi.
138. Metzger 1987, 214-15.
139. Amphilochius of Iconium, *Seleuc.* lines 310-14.

("recognized by many" vs. "rejected")? Why does he classify Revelation as both universally acknowledged *and* rejected?

Two factors are crucial to answering these questions. First, acting as an historian, Eusebius carefully sifts through opinions about the NT books going back to the earliest church fathers. Thus, for Revelation, he knows that at one time it was embraced enthusiastically but had become controversial in his own day. Second, Eusebius is acutely aware of the shape of the NT in the Greek manuscripts that were being used in the churches. For some time in the East, Hebrews was included in the Pauline corpus, so he has no problem listing it as a universally acknowledged book, despite pesky objections from Rome. He is aware of serious questions about the five disputed CE, but it would be inappropriate to classify them as "rejected," because he knows that they have been for some time circulating among a collection of "seven so-called catholic epistles."[140]

As an historian, it is incumbent upon Eusebius to record the stated reasons for excluding the disputed CE from the canon, but as a churchman, he is obliged to keep them in. In AD 330, Constantine commissioned Eusebius to produce fifty copies of the entire Bible in Greek. There is little doubt that these massive codices contained the same twenty-seven books found in the great fourth-century codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.[141]

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced many issues related to Hebrews and the CE by way of a series of challenges they present to us. There are three primary conclusions we can draw before looking more constructively at how to interpret these books.

First, the challenges we have surveyed provide the interpreter with a "situational awareness" about why these books have been subjected to neglect, misunderstanding, and controversy. An amorphous mass of problems can leave the interpreter with an attitude of cynicism or skepticism toward these books, but a deeper understanding of each interpretive challenge affords one the opportunity to deal with each issue patiently and intelligently.

140. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.25 (*NPNF*² 1:128).
141. Bruce 1988, 204; Skeat 1999.

Second, the history of challenges concerning Hebrews and the CE reveals at many points the limitations of any historical investigation of these texts. For instance, interpreters must present modest conclusions concerning what we can know with certainty about such matters as the authorship and setting for most of these books.

Third, interpreters will do well to take a posture of faith in their attempts to negotiate the many challenges of interpreting Hebrews and the CE. Acknowledging them as part of the canon of Scripture is itself an act of faith. By God's providence, the church has seen fit to include even small and seemingly unimportant books in the canon (like 2–3 John and Jude). Jerome and Augustine's stance toward the authorship of Hebrews should serve as a pattern to emulate. While not discarding their critical judgment that Paul had not likely written the Epistle to the Hebrews, they embraced the writing nonetheless as part of the apostolic witness to the gospel, in part because of its Eastern inclusion among the Pauline corpus. After all, the goal of interpreting the Scriptures is not primarily to arrive at a set of objective facts about the production of each book (as important as this is) but to discover sacred truths that are means for people to know and love God. This will be important to keep in mind as we look further at how to read and interpret Hebrews and the CE.